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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000147

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL SOCI VM HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: GVN DECREE ON NORMALIZATION OF PROTESTANTISM IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

REF: HCMC 0084

1. (SBU) A December decree from the GVN National Committee on Religious Affairs, provided to ConGen by the Dak Lak province Representative Board of the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV), promised new steps to "normalize" the operation of Protestant churches in the Central Highlands.

2. (SBU) COMMENT: The decree has caused considerable excitement among some Central Highlands Protestant leaders, who have started developing their own plans to implement the steps of the decree (reftel). This decree may also account for some of the reports of better treatment of the Protestants in the Central Highlands and the lack of reported incidents of serious oppression over Christmas 2003.

3. (SBU) Complete translation of the decree follows:

QUOTE

Government Committee on Religious Affairs

No.: 782/TGCP-TL

Re.: Operation of Protestantism in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc province

Hanoi, 4 December, 2004

To: The Executive Board of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South)

With the Government's approval, the Government Committee on Religious Affairs hereby announces the continuation of the normalization of operation of the SECV in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc province as follows:

1. Those groups which have held a general congress and been recognized by the authorities as official local churches should proceed to apply for a construction permit for worshiping places (churches or house churches) in accordance with the law.

2. Those groups which have stable religious practices and have no involvement in the Dega reactionary organization, while waiting to meet all required conditions to hold a general congress to be recognized as an official local church of SECV, should proceed to register with the local authorities in terms of content, location, practice timetable in order to be allowed to practice religion normally and responsibly before the law.

3. To prepare conditions for the opening of Bible courses (in the form of part-time/in-service training) in order to have pastors-in-charge for house churches after the authorities recognize them.

4. Other activities such as reinstatement, ordination, appointment of pastors, by-pastors, missionaries, spiritual renewals . should be carried out normally in accordance with the law.

It is requested that the Executive Board of the SECV report to the provincial People's Committees and instruct Representative Boards and house churches to implement these directives.

Signed by Chief of the Government Committees on Religious Affairs
Ngo Yen Thi

CC: - The People's Committees of the Central Highlands provinces and Binh Phuoc
- Leaders of the Government's Organization Board

END QUOTE

YAMAUCHI